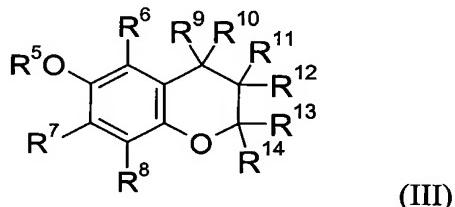


IN THE CLAIMS

Please amend the claims as follows:

Claim 1 (Currently Amended): A process for preparing an ester F of a polyalcohol A with at least one α, β -ethylenically unsaturated carboxylic acid B, comprising: ~~the steps of~~

- a) reacting a polyalcohol A with at least one α, β -ethylenically unsaturated carboxylic acid B in the presence of at least one esterification catalyst C and at least one polymerization inhibitor D, and a solvent E which forms an azeotrope with water, in an oxygenous gas atmosphere, to form an ester F,
 - b) removing at least a portion of the water formed in a) from the reaction mixture, b) during and after a) or after step a),
 - f) neutralizing the reaction mixture,
 - h) removing the solvent by distillation, and
 - i) stripping with a gas inert under the reaction conditions or both steps h) and i),
- which comprises using, as the polymerization inhibitor D, at least one 6-chromanol derivative of the formula (III)



where

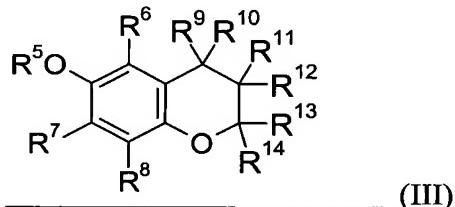
R^5 , R^6 , R^7 , R^8 , R^9 , R^{10} , R^{11} , R^{12} , R^{13} and R^{14} are each independently hydrogen, C₁-C₄-alkyl, and

R^5 is additionally hydrogen, C₁-C₄-alkyl, C₁-C₄-alkylcarbonyl, C₁-C₄-alkyloxycarbonyl, C₆-C₁₂-arylcarbonyl or C₆-C₁₂-aryloxycarbonyl,

and R^{13} is additionally hydrogen, C₁-C₄-alkyl, or chlorine.

Claim 2 (Currently Amended): A process for preparing a crosslinked hydrogel, comprising the steps of

- q) reacting a polyalcohol A with at least one α, β -ethylenically unsaturated carboxylic acid B in the presence of at least one esterification catalyst C and at least one polymerization inhibitor D, and a solvent E which forms an azeotrope with water, in an oxygenous gas atmosphere, to form an ester F,
 - b) removing at least a portion of the water formed in a) from the reaction mixture, b) during and after a) or after step a),
 - f) neutralizing the reaction mixture,
 - h) removing the solvent by distillation, and
 - i) stripping with a gas inert under the reaction conditions or both steps h) and i),
 - k) polymerizing the reaction mixture from one of stages a) to i), additional monoethylenically unsaturated compounds N, and also, at least one further copolymerizable hydrophilic monomer M in the presence of at least one free-radical initiator K and, at least one graft base L,
 - l) postcrosslinking the reaction mixture obtained from k),
 - m) drying the reaction mixture obtained from k) or l) and
 - n) grinding and sieving the reaction mixture obtained from k), l) or m) or grinding or sieving said reaction mixture,
- which comprises using, as the polymerization inhibitor D, at least one 6-chromanol derivative of the formula (III)



where R⁶, R⁷, R⁸, R⁹, R¹⁰, R¹¹, R¹², R¹³ and R¹⁴ are each independently hydrogen, C₁-C₄-alkyl, and

R⁵ is hydrogen, C₁-C₄-alkyl, C₁-C₄-alkylcarbonyl, C₁-C₄-alkyloxycarbonyl, C₆-C₁₂-arylcarbonyl or C₆-C₁₂-aryloxycarbonyl,

and R¹³ is hydrogen, C₁-C₄-alkyl, or chlorine.

Claim 3 (Previously Presented): The process according to claim 1, wherein R⁵ and R⁹ to R¹² in formula (III) are each hydrogen, R⁶, R⁷ and R⁸ are each independently hydrogen or methyl, and R¹³ and R¹⁴ are each methyl.

Claim 4 (Previously Presented): The process according to claim 1, wherein at least one 6-chromanol derivative is selected from the group consisting of 2,2,5,7,8-pentamethyl-6-chromanol, 2,2,5,7-tetramethyl-6-chromanol, 2,2,5,8-tetramethyl-6-chromanol, 2,2,7,8-tetramethyl-6-chromanol, 2,2,5-trimethyl-6-chromanol, 2,2,7-trimethyl-6-chromanol and 2,2,8-trimethyl-6-chromanol.

Claim 5 (Currently Amended): The process according to claim 1, wherein ~~at least one of reaction steps a) and step b)~~ is carried out in the presence of an oxygenous gas.

Claim 6 (Previously Presented): The process according to claim 1, wherein the polyalcohol A is selected from the group consisting of trimethylolbutane, trimethylolpropane, trimethylethane, neopentyl glycol, neopentyl hydroxypivalate, pentaerythritol, glycerol, 1,2-ethylene glycol, 1,2-propylene glycol, 2-ethyl-1,3-propanediol, 2-methyl-1,3-propanediol, hydroquinone, bisphenol A, bisphenol F, bisphenol B, 2,2-bis(4-hydroxycyclohexyl)propane, 1,1-, 1,2-, 1,3- and 1,4-cyclohexanedimethanol, 1,2-, 1,3- or

1,4-cyclohexanediol, but-2-ene-1,4-diol and but-2-yne-1,4-diol, each of which may optionally be alkoxylated.

Claim 7 (Previously Presented): The process according to claim 1, wherein, a C₁-C₄-alkyl ester of a carboxylic acid B is used and, a transesterification catalyst.

Claim 8 (Withdrawn): A crosslinked hydrogel prepared by the process according to claim 2.

Claim 9 (Withdrawn): A crosslinked hydrogel comprising at least one hydrophilic monomer M in copolymerized form, crosslinked with a reaction mixture comprising an ester F, prepared by the process according to claim 1.

Claim 10 (Withdrawn): The crosslinked hydrogel according to claim 8, comprising at least one 6-chromanol derivative of the formula (III).

Claim 11 (Withdrawn): A method of using the crosslinked hydrogel according to claim 8 in hygiene articles, packaging materials and in nonwovens.

Claim 12 (Withdrawn): A method of using the reaction mixtures from the preparation of a (meth)acrylic ester of a polyalcohol or of a purified (meth)acrylic ester according to claim 1, each of which comprise at least one 6-chromanol derivative of the formula (III) as defined in claim 1, as free-radical crosslinkers of water-absorbent hydrogels.

Claim 13 (Withdrawn): A method of using the 6-chromanol derivatives of the formula (III) as defined in claim 1 as the stabilizer in the preparation of (meth)acrylic esters.

Claim 14 (Withdrawn): The method according to claim 12, wherein the (meth)acrylic esters are used as free-radical crosslinkers in hydrogels.

Claim 15 (Withdrawn): A substance mixture comprising at least one 6-chromanol derivative of the formula (III) as defined in claim 1 and at least one stabilizer selected from the group consisting of phenothiazine, hydroquinone, hydroquinone monomethyl ether and hypophosphorous acid.